we're just kids in the dark

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we're just kids in the dark

by FagurFiskur

Summary

“Just relax.” Eddie runs his fingers through Steve’s hair and okay, that actually feels kind of nice. “This is happening, so you might as well enjoy it.”

Robin laughs. “You’re gonna look so pretty, Steve.”

“I’m gonna kill all of you,” Steve mutters but he sits still and lets Eddie muss up his hair probably beyond all recognition. “Seriously, none of this better leave this room.”

Notes

Okay, first Stranger Things fic! I wasn't even gonna write this but these four would not leave me alone, I'm obsessed with their dynamic. I feel extremely unsure about this fic but posting it anyway because it's the exact thing I've been wanting to read and maybe that applies to more people. Title from Kids in the Dark by Bat for Lashes, which is not an 80s song but totally sounds like one.

EDIT (01/12/2022): Everyone go check out these absolutely amazing pieces of fanart by wingly-coded and diamancris on tumblr!! Thought I posted the links to them months ago but apparently not 🕳

Chapter 1

It's amazing how quickly things go back to normal after Vecna.

Steve knows he shouldn't be shocked by that anymore but he kind of is. The whole town was swept up in it this time; even if they never found out what really happened, they still went on a witch hunt for an innocent person. And then they just… moved on. Like none of it happened.

Most of them would probably still believe Eddie had done it if when the government tidied everything up they hadn't framed him as a hero to the media. As the guy who saved three kids from the real murderer: crazy Victor Creel's equally crazy son. It's almost true - Eddie did save the kids but he also went up against something much more dangerous than any of those assholes who were after his blood could ever comprehend.

Okay, so things aren't fully back to normal - not for Eddie, at least - but right now it's the same as any other Friday afternoon before Vecna, manning the counter at Family Video while Robin flips through tapes for them to borrow for the evening. Her parents are out of town for once so they're meeting up at hers for movie night.

"Who are we feeling tonight, Billy Wilder or Nicholas Ray?"

Steve closes the register, glancing over his shoulder where Robin sits behind him on the floor. "Am I supposed to know who either of those people are?"

Robin doesn't look up, placing one tape down in the growing 'no' pile and picking up another. "Come on, you've seen Sunset Boulevard. And you loved Rebel Without a Cause."

Steve had, though that was mostly down to James Dean. And Natalie Wood, who while she didn't look or even act much like her kind of reminded him of Nancy. It had to be those eyes, big and sad and capable of looking right through you with a glance.

"Pick whatever you want. Just remember-"

"No horror," Robin says. "I know."

"Something funny would be a plus," Steve adds.

Robin holds up the tape in her hand - Some Like It Hot, a movie Steve thinks he might have heard of once in passing. “Billy Wilder it is.”

There’s a sudden hush in the store, the chatter between customers dying down to a whisper, and Steve looks around to see that Eddie Munson has entered. He looks around uncomfortably, hands tucked firmly in his pockets as he makes his way to the counter.

“Hey, man,” Steve says, trying not to look too relieved. “Where have you been?”

It’s been a couple of days since he saw Eddie even in passing; the guy has mostly been holed up in his trailer since everything went down. Not that Steve can blame him if this is how people react everywhere he goes, whispering and shooting him not remotely subtle glances.

“Oh, you know,” Eddie says, shrugging. “Around.”

Steve leans against the counter. “Well, you should come around *here* more often.”

Eddie’s eyebrows fly up, lips twitching in a surprised grin, and Steve realizes just how much that sounded like a line.

“That’s not-” Steve waves his hand. “Whatever, I just meant - we don’t see you a lot. After everything.”

“You didn’t see me a lot before everything,” Eddie points out.

“Yeah, but we weren’t friends then.”

Eddie doesn’t question it, like Steve feared he might. He just smiles, pleased, and says, “Well, then I apologize for neglecting our friendship.”

“What do you want, Munson?” Robin calls out, mercifully cutting in before Steve can make an even bigger idiot of himself.

“Movies,” Eddie says. “I heard you got them?”

Robin throws out her arms with a sardonic smile. “Pick your poison.”

“Hang on, I’m not sure what I’m in the mood for yet.” Eddie looks around the store, like whatever he’s looking for might jump off the shelf. “All I know is what I don’t want.”

Horror? Steve wants to ask. Anything that might remind you of

twisting bodies, of dark waters and monsters and evil beyond comprehension?

Instead, he asks, “Billy Wilder?”

Eddie eyes him oddly. Takes a moment to think. “The guy who made The Apartment?”

“Yes!” Robin exclaims from her spot on the floor. “Thank you.”

Steve makes a face at her. She sticks out her tongue back. “We’re gonna watch it tonight, if you wanna join?”

“We were gonna watch Some Like It Hot,” Robin corrects.

“Sounds like a plan,” Eddie says. “I’m in.”

Steve somehow expected that to be harder - like Eddie would need some convincing to hang out with them. Deep down, he still hasn’t let go of the feeling that they belong to two separate worlds. That Eddie would rather rot than spend an evening with Steve ‘The Hair’ Harrington even if they’ve already been through hell and back together.

Literally. Or close as.

“Cool,” Steve says, nodding. “We’re meeting at Robin’s. Place’ll be empty.”

So is mine, he doesn’t say, but I’ll take any excuse not to stay there. That would be a monumentally stupid thing to say to someone who lives in a trailer, especially one where they recently witnessed a gruesome supernatural murder.

“I’ll write down the address,” Robin says.

“Much appreciated,” Eddie says. “You sure I won’t be crashing? Or, y’know, interrupting anything?”

Steve frowns. “Like what?”

“Oh, gross,” Robin says. “No, trust me, we’re not… *that*.”

Eddie shrugs. “Sorry, I just figured - with Wheeler out of the running, maybe…”

The implication hits Steve. He laughs. “No way. Robin’s got much

better taste."

"Plus it would be like making out with my brother," Robin adds. "To reiterate, *gross*."

"Then, if I'm not intruding…"

"You're not," Steve says, "C'mon man, we wouldn't have invited you if we didn't like you."

"This is super exclusive," Robin agrees. "Right now, it's just Steve and I and he doesn't appreciate any of my movie references."

Steve nods. "None."

They're maybe laying it on a little too thick but Eddie doesn't seem put off. If anything, he looks kind of excited. "Guess I've got no choice, then."

Even so, Steve's a little bit surprised when Robin's bell rings that night.

"Not it," Robin says, busily pouring popcorn into a bowl.

"Yeah, yeah," Steve says, jumping off his seat on the counter.

He's barely got the door open when Eddie barrels in past him, whistling as he looks around the foyer. "Nice digs, Buckley."

"Thank you," Robin calls from the kitchen.

Eddie shrugs off his leather jacket to reveal a t-shirt and a denim vest underneath and Steve suddenly remembers something.

"I've still got your vest," he says. "I mean, it's got some blood in it, I tried to get it all out but-"

"Keep it," Eddie says, glancing over his shoulder and grinning. "It suits you better than the crap you normally wear."

Steve looks down at his striped polo and jeans, looks up ready to ask what's wrong with it but Eddie silences him effortlessly with a look.

"Besides," he adds, "those blood stains are badges of honor. There should be some proof of who the real heroes are."

It's kind of unavoidable to read into that - out of all of them, Eddie was the only one singled out by the papers as doing anything heroic - but Eddie's gone before Steve can protest, breezing past him and into the living room.

The Buckleys' living room is small but undeniably cozy. In the center sits a big leather couch littered with half a dozen pillows and the floor covered in the softest carpet imaginable. The curtains are all drawn and the only light source is a small lamp in the corner, which they don't turn off until the movie starts.

Eddie flops right down on the couch, immediately making himself comfortable. Steve rolls his eyes but sits next to him, careful to leave plenty of space for Robin on the other end - not that she won't still put her feet up in his lap and kick him in the side if she thinks he isn't paying proper attention (fall asleep during *one* boring old German movie and you're labeled a philistine for life).

But then, just as Robin steps into the living room, carrying the bowl of popcorn in one hand and a six pack of coke in the other, the bell rings again.

They all exchange looks and Steve hates how his heart is already speeding up, tension creeping underneath his skin. Wordlessly, he and Eddie get up and Robin puts the snacks down on the coffee table, the three of them walking in unison down the hallway, towards the door.

Robin steps in front, leaning in to look through the peephole, and her shoulders immediately relax. She grabs the doorknob, pulling it open, and there on the other side stands Nancy Wheeler, eyes widening as she sees all three of them crowding the doorway.

"Oh, um." She blinks, her eyes briefly meeting Steve's before moving on. "Hi?"

"Hey, Nance," Robin says. "Not that I'm not stoked to see you, but what are you doing here?"

Nancy clears her throat. "I, uh, I thought I'd take you up on your offer of a girls' night. Now I'm realizing I probably should've called ahead."

Steve's eyebrows shoot up. He looks at Robin, who very pointedly doesn't look back at him. Since when did she and Nancy become such good friends that she's inviting her over to her house?

"Hey, it's fine," Robin says. "Who says girls' night has to be girls only?

I'm sure the guys won't mind if you don't."

"I'm all for getting in touch with my feminine side," Eddie chimes in. "Though I draw the line at getting my hair braided."

Robin shoots him a look over her shoulder. "We'll see."

"Are you guys sure I wouldn't be intruding?" Nancy says, shifting in place. "I don't wanna make things… awkward."

Her eyes seek out Steve at that last word, as if she can't help it. Some part of Steve is a little relieved to see her like this, to know he's not the only one unsure of where they stand. She did break up with Jonathan but also made it clear she wasn't interested in getting back together with Steve. Getting rejected by Nancy Wheeler hurt a lot less the second time around but Steve's not gonna pretend he wouldn't have considered taking her back if she'd asked. She knows that. So do Robin and Eddie.

Hence, the awkwardness. But even if Steve's glad he's not alone in feeling it, he also likes Nancy too much to wanna watch her squirm. He still wants to be her friend, if nothing else.

"Hey, it's fine," he says, aware that it's not just Nancy looking at him now but Robin and Eddie too, and doing a piss-poor job of hiding it. "It'd be cool to hang out with all of you, like, not in the Upside Down."

Clearly, that was the right thing to say, as Nancy's shoulders drop, lips quirking in a small, relieved smile.

Eddie pats Steve's shoulder, grinning. "Excellent point, man. What do you say we get this show on the road?"

"There's one more thing," Nancy says, looking a little hesitant again as she reaches into her bag.

And pulls out a bottle of tequila.

Steve blinks. "Where did you…?"

"Don't ask," Nancy says. She smiles awkwardly. "I just… Robin mentioned maybe wanting to do shots?"

Because Nancy is Nancy, of course she brought limes too. She and

Robin duck into the kitchen to cut them up and get shot glasses, and Steve and Eddie retreat back into the living room. Steve sits down on the floor - doing tequila shots feels like a sit-on-the-floor kind of activity - and Eddie joins him.

“Man,” he says, patting the carpet. “What’s this thing made of, Persian cat?”

Steve nods. “Right? It’s ridiculously soft.”

“So are you really okay with Nancy being here?”

The change in topic sends Steve’s brain reeling but he’s quick to recover. Eddie looks genuinely worried and something about that makes Steve’s chest feel warm - sure, he may not have a girlfriend but he’s got friends who actually care about him. That's a lot more than he had a couple of years ago.

“I’m really okay,” Steve says. “And even if I wasn’t, trust me, I’ve been through worse.”

Eddie laughs. “Can’t argue with you there.”

Steve’s saved from any further interrogation as the girls enter the room, arms loaded with libations. They put everything down on the floor and sit down, the four of them arranged in a circle.

“Okay, so,” Robin says, clapping her hands on her thighs. “How do we do this?”

“Drink?” Steve asks.

“You know what I mean, dingus. What order do we go in, is it lime, tequila, salt or what?”

Eddie reaches for the bottle. “A demonstration is in order.” He pours a generous shot in one of the glasses and grabs the salt shaker. “Harrington, give me your hand.”

Steve frowns but holds out his palm. Eddie grabs his hand, turns it around and then leans in to lick a stripe right by his thumb. Steve laughs, startled, but Eddie holds tightly onto him, pouring a pinch of salt on the patch of skin he just licked.

“It goes salt,” he tells Robin, then leans back down and licks Steve’s skin clean, sending Steve’s stomach on a somersault. “Tequila.” He

drops Steve's hand, grabs the shot glass and downs it smoothly. "Lime." Picks up a slice of lime, biting down on it.

"Was that necessary?" Steve asks, still laughing. He feels kind of like he was the one who just took a shot, giddy and warm and a little light headed.

Weird.

"Necessary?" Eddie says, grinning. "No. But a much more memorable teaching method, wouldn't you agree?"

Robin snorts. "Absolutely."

"I'd say so," Nancy says, and even she's looking charmed by Eddie's antics.

This was Eddie's way of breaking the ice, Steve realizes, and banishing that last bit of lingering tension. And somehow, it worked.

"Okay, no making fun of me if I fuck this up," Robin says as she pours a round. "I'm talking to you, Harrington."

Steve snorts, accepting the salt shaker from Eddie. "This isn't cracking secret Russian code, Rob."

"That I actually know how to do." Robin grins. "Bottoms up?"

In unison, they drink. The tequila slides down easy, mixing with the salt and the lime to create a taste that reminds Steve of being stupid and reckless and young. Like he's not still all of those things, just with a head full of monsters and a flock of people to constantly worry about.

They take a couple more shots in quick succession, just enough until everyone's nice and loose. At some point, Robin gets up and puts on music - something chill and heavy on acoustic guitar, the exact kind of music you *don't* get wasted to - and she and Nancy sing along to the chorus in off-key harmony, breaking into giggles every other line.

"Okay," Eddie says as the song fades out, "I gotta ask, secret Russian code?"

"Oh." Steve leans back on his elbows. "Yeah, that was last year. These evil Russian scientists were hiding underneath Starcourt mall, trying to open a gate to the Upside Down. Henderson intercepted their

messages and then it turns out Robin's this secret genius and she totally cracked their code."

Eddie looks between the two of them, clearly skeptical. "You're shitting me."

"I wish," Robin says. "We got kidnapped in our Scoops uniforms. Went on the scariest elevator ride of my *life*."

"And we got drugged," Steve adds. "They thought we were working for the government or something."

"Steve got the worst of it, they beat the crap out of him."

Steve rubs his jaw, soothing some phantom pain. "Still only the fifth worst thing to happen that week."

"It was brutal," Robin agrees.

Eddie shakes his head. "You people lead bizarre lives."

"Eh." Robin shrugs. "I'll take evil Russian scientists over crazy mob who thinks you're involved in ritual sacrifice."

"I'd take both to avoid another round with Vecna," Nancy chimes in.

They collectively shudder and for a moment, it's like a dark shadow has crept over the room. Nancy looks like she regrets ever opening her mouth and that won't do, so Steve quickly redirects the conversation.

"What kinda girls' night is this?" he asks. "Shouldn't we be painting each other's nails or something?"

Robin sits up straighter, a gleeful smile spreading across her lips. Steve, realizing his error too late, opens his mouth to protest but she cuts him off before he can speak. "No take backs!."

She jumps to her feet, stumbling a little as she bolts off to her bedroom.

"It better be black," Steve calls after her.

"I don't know, I think periwinkle might be your color," Eddie muses. Steve leans over and punches his shoulder and Eddie laughs. "What, too fruity?"

Steve frowns. "C'mon man, don't say it like that."

Eddie pauses, shot glass halfway up to his lips. “Like what?”

“Like…” Steve searches his mind. “Crap, what’s the word? Like it’s a bad thing.”

“Derogatory?” Nancy says.

“Yes, thank you!”

Nancy tilts her head, smile turned soft. “You continue to surprise me, Steve Harrington.”

“That’s a good thing, right?”

“Yes.” She looks away, and it’s just then that Steve notices she’s blushing. Or maybe it’s the tequila? “In this case, definitely.”

“Oh.” Steve has no idea what to do with that. “Cool.”

He turns to look at Eddie, wanting confirmation of the monumental weirdness of the moment, but Eddie’s looking at him strangely too, like Steve’s some puzzle he wants to figure out.

“What?”

Eddie shakes his head, lips twitching. “Nothing, man.”

Robin comes back into the room, holding a bottle of (thankfully) black polish. She sits down next to Steve and looks around the circle. “What’d I miss?”

“I’m not sure,” Steve says. He holds out his hands, sighing when Robin wiggles in her seat with barely contained excitement. “Let’s just get this over with.”

“You’re gonna look so sick,” Robin assures him.

She starts applying the polish, and while she’s clearly used to doing it the tequila has not been kind on her fine-motor coordination, with about a third of the polish ending up on the skin around Steve’s fingernails. Even so, it doesn’t look half-bad.

Eddie gets up but he doesn’t go far, sitting down on the couch behind Steve. Then, suddenly, there’s a hand grabbing Steve’s hair. Steve ducks his head on instinct.

“What are you doing?”

“Isn’t it obvious?” Eddie tuts. “I’m taking advantage while Buckley’s got your hands occupied and braiding your hair.”

Steve sputters. “Like hell-”

“Just relax.” Eddie runs his fingers through Steve’s hair and okay, that actually feels kind of nice. “This is happening, so you might as well enjoy it.”

Robin laughs. “You’re gonna look so pretty, Steve.”

“I’m gonna kill all of you,” Steve mutters but he sits still and lets Eddie muss up his hair probably beyond all recognition. “Seriously, none of this better leave this room.”

He feels kind of like a Ken doll or something, caught between two drunk, overgrown children. It’s not the worst feeling in the world. Robin’s hands are small and soft against his but her grip is tight. Meanwhile, Eddie’s fingers are thick but his touch delicate, carefully pulling apart strands of hair as he begins to braid them. It actually feels *really* nice, every brush of Eddie’s fingertips against his scalp sending shivers down Steve’s spine.

Nancy shifts in her seat, leaning closer to Robin. “Do you mind, Robin?”

“Huh?” Robin doesn’t look up but she freezes when Nancy reaches out, running her fingers through the hairs at the nape of her neck.

“I’m feeling kind of left out,” Nancy says. “Can I braid your hair?”

“Uh.” Robin looks up at Steve, eyes wide, all deer caught in the headlights. “Sure?”

Steve’s eyebrows fly up. He did not see this coming, though in hindsight, of course he should have. Robin likes girls, and Steve’s not sure how anyone who likes girls could avoid crushing on Nancy Wheeler after getting to know her. She’s kind of amazing.

Robin goes back to painting his nails, head ducked down, but her hands are trembling just a bit. Steve grabs her wrist with his one free hand, and she looks up. He gestures with his eyes at the kitchen doorway, in what he hopes is an obvious signal for ‘let’s go talk about this in private’.

Robin nods, mouthing, ‘After.’

About ten minutes later and Steve's sporting a manicure that could generously be described as 'artistic', his hair pulled back in a thick, messy braid that's a light breeze away from unraveling completely.

"I feel like I just desecrated a national treasure," Eddie says, and he doesn't sound at all sorry about it.

Nancy's moved on from Robin's hair, which is bound in twin braids that weirdly suit her, and is currently finishing a fourth tiny braid on the side of Eddie's head. With the two of them occupied, Steve grabs his chance.

"I vote we get more snacks and get the movie started." He turns to Robin, who still looks on the edge of panicking. "Robin, help me out in the kitchen?"

Nancy's thankfully too focused on her braiding to pay attention but Eddie shoots them a suspicious look. Steve chooses to ignore him, tugging on Robin's arm and leading her into the other room.

As soon as they're alone, Robin turns to Steve with big, scared eyes. "I'm so sorry."

"What?" Steve laughs, confused. "What are you apologizing for?"

"C'mon, Steve." Robin looks around, then leans in close, her voice lowered. "I know you noticed me having a minor meltdown over Nancy Wheeler literally touching a single strand of my hair."

"I don't know if I'd say minor…"

Robin slaps his shoulder. "Don't make fun, I'm being serious. Crushing on your best friend's ex is like a major taboo, right? It's not cool."

"It is though," Steve insists. "I get it, trust me. And it's not like you can help it, right?" Robin shakes her head. "Right. You like who you like, there's no controlling that."

"But you still like her."

"That's-" Steve waves his hand. "I don't know, it's complicated. There's a lot there. I'm probably always gonna have some type of feelings for her but it's not like - I don't wanna get back together. Not anymore. But it's - you get it."

"I really do," Robin says dejectedly. "This sucks, Steve."

“Yeah.” Steve sighs. He wraps his arm around her, squeezes her tight to his side and kisses her braided head. Robin slumps against him, a puppet with all her strings cut. “Yeah, I know.”

If it took them an unusually long time to grab a couple of bags of snacks from the kitchen, neither Nancy or Eddie mention it when they get back. The music has been turned off, the movie’s cued up, and Nancy is painting tiny black daisies on Eddie’s nails with the polish.

“Nice flowers,” Steve says, nodding at Eddie as he sits down next to him.

“You’re just jealous that I got the better manicurist.”

Robin scoffs. “Shut up, I did an awesome job.”

She really didn’t but out of loyalty, Steve says nothing. She walks over to the VCR, pressing play and the movie begins with an aggressively jazzy tune.

“If you fall asleep during this one, movie nights are over,” Robin informs him.

Fortunately, the movie turns out to be fun, though it’s not until Jack Lemmon and Tony Curtis show up in dresses and wigs that Steve realizes why Robin likes it so much.

Eddie leans in close, handing the tequila bottle off to Steve as he does so. Steve accepts it, sipping straight from the bottle. “Out of the two of us, which one do you think could pull the whole drag act off better?”

Steve takes another sip. “Hard to say. You’re more… theatrical. But I’m prettier.”

“Shut up,” Eddie laughs, shoving him. “You saying I’m not pretty?”

“Sure you are,” Steve says, and enjoys the way he actually seems to catch Eddie off guard. “Just not as pretty as me.”

Eddie hums. “That is a rather tall order.”

The movie keeps going, the four of them passing around the tequila bottle and bags of snacks, and mostly staying quiet aside from the occasional comment. Steve’s having a better time than expected; it’s the first time he’s seen Marilyn Monroe on screen and not just in static

images, and she's like actually hilarious. The plot is weird and Steve's too drunk to keep all the relationships and flirtations straight, so when at the end the old guy seems into Jack Lemmon even out of drag he's not sure if he should be surprised or not.

Steve looks down at Robin to ask her but finds that while he and Eddie have been sharing the couch, Nancy and Robin are just about cuddling down on the floor, pressed close and Nancy's head resting on Robin's shoulder.

It's weird. If Steve didn't know Robin was into Nancy, he wouldn't think twice about seeing them cuddled up like that. And yet, it would be weird for him and Eddie to be in the same position. What a stupid double standard.

He turns to Eddie to share this observation but looking Eddie in the face has him actually thinking about what it would be like cuddling with him and the words get stuck in his throat.

He doesn't… hate it?

"Hey," Eddie says, oblivious to Steve's sudden internal crisis. "I don't know if it's gonna match the vibes in here but I brought some herbal refreshments, just in case you guys wanted to partake."

Robin looks up. "You brought tea?"

"Weed," Steve croaks. The three of them all turn to look at him strangely. He clears his throat. "He's talking about weed, Robin."

"Indeed I am." Eddie reaches into his pocket, pulling out two joints. "What do you say?"

"Sure," Steve says. "If everyone's up for it."

Nancy and Robin exchange looks - and of course, neither one of them has ever smoked before.

"Might be cool to try out drugs without being forced to by scary Russians," Robin says. "Like taking back my power?"

"I kind of wanna see what the big deal is," Nancy admits.

Eddie crows. "That's the spirit, ladies!"

He gets a lighter out of another pocket, tucking one of the joints behind his ear and the other between his lips as he lights it. He takes a

long drag, holding it for a couple of seconds and then exhaling.

“See that?” he asks the girls. “You inhale, you hold, you exhale. Do it gently, or you’re gonna cough. You’ll probably cough regardless, since it’s your first time, but y’know. Best practice.”

He hands the joint off to Steve. The tip of it is slightly moist, and Steve feels his ears warming up at the thought of it. Which is stupid, it’s not like he hasn’t shared a joint with other guys before. Nothing different about Eddie.

A couple of puffs and he’s passing the joint to Nancy, who looks at it with determination before placing it at her lips, holding it like she would a cigarette. She inhales, holding it for just a moment before releasing, coughing as the smoke exits her mouth.

“That’s foul,” she says, handing the joint over to Robin.

“It’s primo stuff,” Eddie argues. “Trust me, you’re in luck getting your first batch from me.”

Robin has a full on coughing fit, interrupting them. “Shit,” she sputters in between coughs. “How do you do this?”

Eddie pats her on the back. “You get the hang of it soon enough. Shotgunning would probably be the gentlest option for your first time but… uh, that’s not happening here.”

“Shotgunning?” Robin repeats, clearing her throat. She’s completely red in the face, though Steve’s not sure if it’s from the coughing or Nancy’s hand rubbing circles between her shoulder blades.

“It’s when someone else takes a drag and blows the smoke in your mouth,” Eddie explains. “I’d demonstrate, but…”

Right. There’s not really a good option for Eddie to demonstrate on. Robin’s a no-go, for obvious reasons, and Steve hasn’t known him for long but he knows Eddie’s too good of a friend to do that with Nancy right in front of him. Which just leaves…

“You can use me.”

Everyone’s looking at him, Eddie staring like he suddenly grew two heads, and Steve realizes he said that out loud and didn’t just think it. God, he really is wasted.

“If you don’t mind,” he adds lamely.

“You - are you sure?” There’s a strange edge in Eddie’s voice, a sort of urgency that Steve has no idea how to interpret.

Steve swallows. “Yeah, sure. What’s the big deal?”

Wordlessly, Robin holds the joint out to Eddie. Eddie takes it, contemplating as he rolls it between his fingers.

“Okay, but if you hurl in my face-”

“Relax, you’re not *that* repulsive.”

For a couple of moments, no one says anything. No one moves. Then Eddie shrugs his shoulders, looking like he’s preparing himself for battle as he brings the joint up to his lips.

He inhales for what feels like forever, then raises his hand, cupping the back of Steve’s neck and pulling him in close. Steve’s mouth drops open and he almost forgets to breathe in as smoke starts to billow out between them. Eddie’s hand is like a brand, heavy and warm, their lips brushing just barely and *holy shit*, Steve’s heart is gonna beat out of his chest, *what the fuck is he doing* …

Eddie pulls away and Steve exhales, feeling like he just plummeted fifty floors in a secret Russian elevator.

What the hell was that?

“So, uh,” Eddie clears his throat, “that’s how you shotgun.”

“Hot,” Robin deadpans.

Steve kicks her.

“I mean, it is a little sexy,” Nancy says, and it’s no fair, because Steve can’t kick *her*. “Are you sure it’s an easier way to smoke and not just an excuse invented to make out?”

Steve’s stomach flips at the idea - what would that say about *him*, since he was the one who suggested it in the first place? - but he relaxes as he looks around the room and realizes who he’s with. What Nancy just said, with zero judgment. What Eddie just did, at the slightest provocation. Maybe, even if he had meant it that way, it would still be okay?

Eddie turns to Steve, wagging his eyebrows. “As if we need an excuse.”

Steve’s meant to make some witty comeback here but all he can do is blush.

“Don’t hog the joint,” Robin says, saving him. “I wanna try again.”

Whatever weird moment just happened there seems to linger. There’s a new sort of tension in the room, one that doesn’t ease even as they smoke their way through this joint and the next. At some point, someone other than Steve gets up and puts the music back on, slow and hypnotic synth pop this time.

It’s good. It’s comfortable, even if Steve’s stupid heart won’t slow down, even if he’s becoming increasingly aware of Eddie leaning in incrementally closer, his entire side feeling on fire where Eddie’s pressed against it.

And then, suddenly, Steve looks down and sees that the girls are asleep on the floor.

Robin’s head resting on a pillow and Nancy’s head resting on her chest, both of them softly snoring. Seeing them like this makes Steve’s chest tighten; he loves them both *so much* and they’re both here with him, safe and happy. They’d be so good for each other, he thinks. Much better than he and Nancy were.

“They look comfortable,” Eddie comments, his voice so very close to Steve’s ear. His head is practically resting on Steve’s shoulder by now. “It’d be nice to be able to sleep like that.”

Even in his addled state, Steve catches his drift. “Nightmares?”

“Constant. I don’t know how you handle it.”

“I don’t know either,” Steve admits. “I’ve gotten kind of used to just… repressing it.”

“Fuck, I wish I could do that.” Eddie runs a hand through his hair. “I thought it made me a badass, not repressing shit, carrying all of it on the surface like some armor.”

“That *is* badass. You’re not scared of anything.” At Eddie’s incredulous look, Steve amends, “I’m not talking about Upside Down stuff, obviously. Anyone would be scared of that. I mean regular life,

popularity, all that high school bullshit. You never cared about fitting in. That's admirable."

"Well, I'm a freak any way you cut it. Might as well embrace it."

Steve shrugs. "Eh, being a freak's not so bad. I'd take you over any of the so-called normal people in Hawkins any day."

"Now you're just flattering me."

Steve turns, and *oh*, Eddie's right there. Inches away. With those dark eyes, all intense, like he can see right through Steve and maybe, hopefully, likes what he sees.

He leans in even closer and Steve closes his eyes on instinct, heart hammering away, but instead of feeling lips on his he feels them press against the column of his neck, a brief, dry kiss just below his jawline.

Steve swallows. He feels like he's gonna pass out or fly right off this couch, except he couldn't do that, could he, because at some point Eddie's body blanketed his entirely, pinning him down.

"What-" he croaks out, breath catching in his throat as Eddie kisses him again, the sensitive skin behind his ear this time. "What are you doing?"

Eddie raises his head. Looks him in the eyes, searching. "Do you want me to stop?"

But like hell is Steve getting out another word. He reaches out, grabbing a fistful of Eddie's shirt and raising his head up to kiss him, a proper kiss this time, lips on lips and everything. Eddie makes a soft noise and then he's kissing him back, pressing in even closer like he wants to melt right into him.

They kiss and they kiss and Steve's not sure how he's even breathing, if he's even breathing, or if it's just Eddie keeping him alive at this point, exchanging oxygen like they did smoke earlier.

At some point, and it could be minutes or hours later, they finally surface for air. Steve looks up at Eddie, his red lips and wild eyes, and it hits him like an avalanche.

"I think I like you," he tells Eddie, breathless.

Eddie laughs, ducking his head against Steve's chest, and Steve's heart stutters, bracing for a brutal rejection that he's *not* ready for. But then Eddie looks at him, all smiles, and, "I think I like you, too. If that wasn't abundantly clear."

"Doesn't hurt to hear it," Steve mutters, trying not to show just how close he was to panicking.

Eddie seems to understand anyway. He places his palm on Steve's chest, directly above his heart. "This is nuts, you know that?"

"Any more nuts than the rest of our lives?" Steve asks.

"Fair point." Eddie leans in, dark eyes sparkling with amusement. "I'm gonna kiss you again, okay?"

"Okay," Steve echoes. "Very, very okay."

They meet in the middle this time.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> I wasn't gonna write another chapter but then I felt inspired and couldn't resist! The fic is actually over now, though I do have a couple of ideas for sequels should the mood strike me. If there's anything particular you'd like to see in any potential sequels, let me know!

Robin wakes up and immediately wishes she hadn't. Her head is pounding, her entire body hurts - did she fall asleep on the *floor*? - and her mouth tastes like ass.

There's something heavy and warm resting on her chest and when Robin cracks her eyes open and sees a blurry, dark head of hair her first thought is that she and Steve must have passed out during movie night. Then she blinks, her vision clears, and she realizes - that's not Steve. That's *Nancy Wheeler*, asleep practically on top of her, one arm wrapped around Robin's waist.

Holy shit.

Robin draws in a sharp breath. She looks up and her mounting panic comes to an abrupt stop, a popped balloon. Because Steve is asleep on the couch and he is *not alone* . Eddie is on top of him, blanketing his entire body, head against Steve's shoulder and hand shoved like all the way up Steve's shirt, resting on his chest, and - is that a *hickey* on Steve's neck?

"Oh my god," Robin whispers.

She hears a soft noise and oh right, her other crisis. Nancy's waking up, raising her head and peering up at Robin. Robin's brain is gonna explode because she knows what Nancy Wheeler looks like in the morning now, all sleep-soft with her pink cheeks and messy hair, and Robin wants to kiss her *so bad* but if she doesn't think fast then Nancy's gonna see Steve and Eddie cuddling, looking practically post-coital, and…

"Are you okay?" Nancy asks, voice just barely a whisper.

"Fine," Robin squeeks.

Nancy sits up, rubbing her eyes, and Robin watches in frozen horror as she spots the guys on the couch. Nancy blinks, hand dropping against her side, mouth going slack in shock. She looks back at Robin, who shrugs helplessly.

A couple of moments pass in silence, the longest moments of Robin's entire life, and then Nancy says quietly, "Do you want to get breakfast?"

It's so unexpected that all Robin can think of in response is, "I can make scrambled eggs?"

Nancy smiles. "Sounds good."

This isn't the weirdest morning of Robin's life but it's definitely up there. Nancy Wheeler is in her kitchen, sitting by the counter and sipping coffee, still in her clothes from the night before and still looking more put together than Robin feels on most days.

Robin looks down at the scrambled eggs on her pan and feels a sort of sympathy. She feels scrambled to bits too, and she hasn't opened her mouth since they entered the kitchen because if she starts speaking now she's pretty sure she'll never stop.

What is Nancy thinking about? Whatever it is, it can't be good, not after what they witnessed in the living room. Nancy's a good person but even good people can be ignorant.

And still, it's not like she's said anything. She's just staring off into the distance, looking deep in thought.

Finally, Robin can't take any more. "Nance?"

Nancy looks up, startled. "What?"

"Are you-" Robin pauses but she doesn't know how to say everything she's thinking. *Please say you're not disgusted by what we saw in the living room. Please don't tell anyone. Please don't break Steve's heart again, please don't break* my *heart, because I can take you not liking me but I couldn't handle it if you hated me.*

"Did you know?" Nancy asks. "About Steve and Eddie?"

Robin laughs, and maybe it's a little bit hysterical but she thinks she's

entitled. “Steve and Eddie? Uh, no. I don’t think there was anything to know until last night. Steve would’ve-”

She bites down on her tongue but Nancy seems to get it.

“He would’ve told you,” she finishes for her. “And you would have been… okay with it?”

“Are you?” Robin shoots back.

“Yes,” Nancy says simply.

Robin stops breathing. It’s like a punch to the stomach but in a good way, somehow. Nancy didn’t hesitate, she just came right out and said it, and Robin’s mind is already taking the implications and running with them way into the distance.

Don’t get your hopes up, you moron. It doesn’t have to mean anything.

“And you?” Nancy asks. Challenges, really, and Robin wants to laugh again at the idea of Nancy feeling she needs to protect Steve from *her*.

“Yes,” she says. “Of course. Steve’s my best friend, I just want him to be happy.”

She means to stop there but something about the way Nancy is looking at her makes her feel reckless. She wants Nancy to know, needs her to know, and even as her stomach sinks with dread, she forces the words out, voice trembling, “And it… it would be pretty hypocritical of me if I wasn’t. Especially since Steve’s okay with me.”

There. It’s out. Robin bounces on her heels, resisting the urge to do something stupid like throwing out jazz hands - ‘ta-da, here I am, little gay old me’ - while she watches Nancy’s wide eyes, her brain going a mile a minute.

And then, just as the tension is starting to become unbearable, Nancy smiles.

It’s small, and she’s clearly trying to suppress it, but it’s there.

Robin told Nancy she’s gay and Nancy *smiled*.

“I see,” she says, delicate. She looks down at her coffee, then back up at Robin, eyes sparkling. “That’s… good to know.”

Good to know? Robin wants to shout, her heart close to bursting out of

her chest. *What does that* mean?

Nancy laughs quietly. “I, uh. I should go brush my teeth.”

Robin is gonna die. Her heart is gonna explode and it will all be Nancy Wheeler’s fault.

“Do you need a toothbrush?” she asks faintly.

“I brought my own,” Nancy says. “Since we were drinking, I thought maybe - just in case.”

“Oh.”

She watches Nancy go, the thoughts tumbling around her head too quickly to keep up with. What is going on, what is Nancy *thinking*, is Robin about to get her hopes dashed against the rocks of reality or is something actually going to happen…

Steve. She needs to talk to Steve.

She all but runs to the living room, stopping short in the doorway, because Steve is still asleep but Eddie. Eddie’s awake, propped up on one elbow and staring down at Steve with the most tender expression on his face.

God, eighteen years of nothing and now Robin can’t take a step in her own house without tripping over the gayest shit imaginable. It’s like going from a drought to a flood and Robin’s not sure if she’s gonna sink or swim.

“Hey,” she says.

Eddie startles, dropping his hand and accidentally smacking Steve in the face. Steve’s eyes snap open and with a strangled shout he twists underneath Eddie, sending him tumbling to the ground.

“Oh, shit.” Robin runs over but Eddie’s already getting up, looking more confused than hurt at suddenly being on the floor. Steve sits up, chest heaving and hands raised, ready for a fight. He looks around, eyes wild, balking when he spots Eddie.

“Fuck,” he exhales, swinging his legs down and reaching out to help pull Eddie back up. “Shit, I’m sorry. You okay, man?”

“Just peachy,” Eddie groans, rubbing his forehead. “Jesus, that’s some quick reflexes.”

“Sorry,” Steve says again. He raises his hand, brushing Eddie’s hair away from his face, examining him. His expression turns soft and he grins like he can’t help it. “Hey.”

Eddie grins back. “Hey, yourself.”

Robin clears her throat. “Not to ruin the moment, but I need to borrow Steve.”

She doesn’t wait for an answer, just grabs Steve by the arm and drags him out into the hallway, and out the door to the front porch. She likes Eddie but this is not a conversation she’s ready to have in front of him; besides, now there’s less risk of Nancy overhearing.

Steve puts his hands on his hips. “What is it?” He suddenly pales. “Where’s Nancy?”

Robin points over her shoulder with her thumb. “Inside, brushing her teeth.”

“But she was here,” Steve says. “Right? She slept here like the rest of us. She saw…”

He trails off, and Robin has never seen him look so scared and helpless (at least, not in this dimension, but that’s not something she ever wants to dwell on). It makes her heart ache and she knows she’ll do whatever she can to make sure he never feels this way again.

“Hey, no, it’s fine.” She puts her hand on Steve’s shoulder. “You’re good, she didn’t - she was fine with it.”

“She was?” Steve asks suspiciously.

Robin nods. “Yep. She actually seemed worried I might not be. She’s protective of you.”

“She’s fine with it,” Steve repeats. He doesn’t look fully reassured. “But it’s - I don’t even know what *it* is. We didn’t really talk about it, we just…”

And he’s blushing now, actually *blushing.*

Robin bites down on her tongue, trying to contain her glee. “You’re so into him.”

“I’m not gay,” Steve says.

Robin raises an eyebrow. “Trust me, I’m well aware, Mr. I-like-boobies. Doesn’t mean you can’t also like Eddie.”

“But that’s - is that even a thing? Liking both?”

“Sure,” Robin says, even though she has no idea. If Steve does, that’s proof enough for her that it’s a thing.

“Maybe I do like him,” Steve admits. The tips of his ears have turned red. “He’s a good kisser. He’s good at… a lot of stuff.”

Robin makes a face. “Oh my god, don’t tell me you had sex while we were sleeping two feet away from you.”

“No, we did not-” Steve lowers his voice, “have sex. Do you think I have no self-control?”

“That’s debatable.”

She cackles as Steve punches her shoulder. “You’re an asshole, you know that, Buckley?”

“I’m well aware.” Robin clears her throat, remembering that she didn’t just bring Steve out here to tease him. “Okay, but I’ve got a situation.”

Steve crosses his arms, concerned. “What is it?”

“It’s not just that Nancy was okay with you two,” Robin says. “She actually… it felt like maybe she’s…?”

“What? Spill!”

And so Robin does. She relates the entire conversation in the kitchen to Steve, beat for beat, the words pouring out of her almost quicker than she can keep up with. By the end of it, she’s out of breath, and Steve is looking at her with the strangest expression, one Robin has no idea how to interpret.

“So, I think she could maybe… be into me?” she finishes. “But I’m probably reading into something that’s not there? I definitely am.” She shakes her head. “Oh my god, I am such a moron.”

“Yeah, you are,” Steve says, and ouch. “Robin, she’s *obviously* into you. The signals couldn’t be clearer if she was screaming them through a megaphone!”

Robin twists her hands. Steve knows Nancy better than her, knows

how she flirts. But it's too good to be true, right? "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure."

"Because it's just so statistically improbable. What are the chances of four people in the same group of friends all being some level of gay? That just doesn't happen, not in a small town like Hawkins."

Steve throws up his hands. "Whatever, it doesn't matter if you believe me or not. Just remember, when she shoves her tongue down your throat in twenty minutes, I told you so."

And he goes back inside, leaving Robin alone on the front porch, mind reeling. She looks down at her watch and scoffs.

Twenty minutes, her butt. Even if Nancy's into her, there's no way she's moving that fast.

The others have already started eating by the time Robin makes it back to the kitchen. Eddie is sitting on top of the counter and Steve stands next to him, fidgeting like he thinks maybe he's not allowed to be this close. Nancy's sitting in the same spot as before and she smiles at Robin over the rim of her coffee cup when she enters.

Twenty minutes.

Right.

Robin raises her hand in a lame little half-wave, rushing past the others for the rest of the scrambled eggs by the stove. She's not feeling all that hungry but she starts eating anyway, just to keep her mouth occupied with something besides talking.

"Well," Eddie says, clapping his hands. "This has been nice, but I gotta jet. My shift starts in half an hour and if I don't shower first, I'm afraid my rank odor might scare away all our customers."

"You work at the record store, right?" Nancy asks. "Deep Cuts?"

Eddie points at her. "Got it in one. Should you ever want to expand your music-listening horizones, pay us a visit. I'll hook you up with the good stuff."

"I just might do that."

Eddie grins. He looks down at Steve, who's looking at him with such fond exasperation that Robin wonders how she never picked up on the vibe between them before. "You coming, Harrington?"

"Oh, you're both leaving?" Robin asks, trying to sound casual.

"Yeah," Steve says, raising his eyebrows at her with a significant look that's not even a little bit subtle. "Eddie insists I need to start my musical education, like, immediately."

"Posthaste," Eddie agrees.

He grabs Steve's shoulder, holding on as he hops down from the counter. Steve tries his best to look annoyed but the effect is somewhat ruined by the way he can't stop smiling.

Eddie grabs Robin into a hug, then Nancy. Steve does the same, leaning in close to whisper in Robin's ear as he hugs her, "Twenty minutes."

"Shut up," Robin whispers back, cheeks burning.

And then there were two. A hush falls over the kitchen, only broken by Robin's fingers tapping against the counter.

"So are-"

"Do you-"

They both stop, laughing awkwardly.

"You first," Nancy says.

Robin nods. Right. She's got this. "I'm… gonna go brush my teeth."

Okay, so she doesn't got this. Nancy raises her eyebrows, amused, and Robin scoots past her before she can respond.

God, what is she doing? Steve was wrong, there's no way Nancy likes her. She's so composed, so smart and talented and so unfairly beautiful. What's Robin next to her? Even if by some miracle Nancy is into girls, she's still way out of Robin's league.

Brushing her teeth does exactly nothing to calm her down. If anything, it sends her brain spiraling faster, because she can't stop thinking about Nancy standing in this spot earlier, having just learned that Robin is gay and *smiling* about it.

“Get it together, Buckley,” Robin mutters, spitting out the rest of the toothpaste and rinsing her mouth. “You survived the Upside Down, you can handle one morning with Nancy Wheeler.”

She exits the bathroom and nearly trips over her own feet because Nancy is right there, waiting in the hallway for her. She holds out a hand to steady Robin, grasping her elbow, and even that simple touch is enough to send Robin’s heart pounding.

“I’m sorry,” Robin says, not knowing why she’s apologizing. “Did you need to use the bathroom?”

Nancy doesn’t answer. She just looks up at Robin, eyes intense, mouth set in a determined line.

“Just tell me to stop and I will,” she says.

“Stop what…?” Robin chokes out.

Nancy starts to lean in and Robin realizes what’s going on just a split second before soft lips press against hers. For a moment, everything is suspended and Robin feels like she’s floating, her entire being focused only on where Nancy is touching her. her heart beating so quick it might burst.

Then Nancy’s drawing away and there’s not a power on Earth, not even her own stupid, overactive brain that can prevent Robin from chasing her, hand coming up to cup Nancy’s cheek and drawing her in for another kiss.

Nancy sighs against her lips and then she’s wrapping an arm around Robin’s waist, pulling her in closer, and this is it, Robin has officially died and gone to heaven, because what other explanation is there?

After what feels like eternity and yet not nearly long enough, they part, and Robin has to press her lips together to hold back the sudden burst of giggles threatening to escape her.

“Was that… okay?” Nancy asks.

“Definitely.” Robin nods. “So, so much better than okay.”

Nancy smiles. God, she’s even more devastatingly beautiful like this, cheeks flushed and eyes alight. “I wasn’t sure if you-”

“Have been wanting to do that for weeks?” Robin finishes. “Because

yeah, I have. I'm, like, stupidly into you."

"Good," Nancy hums. She raises her free hand, bringing it up to rest on Robin's chest, squeezed between them. "I'm stupidly into you, too."

There's nothing Robin can say in response that wouldn't further reveal just how ridiculously far gone she is on Nancy, so she leans in for another kiss.

Twenty minutes, Steve said.

Turns out, it was more like ten.

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